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homemakers' chat

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SUBJECT: "HOMEMADE BREAD AND ROLLS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture. ★ Pub 1144942 ★ available, Farmers' Bulletin 1775-F, Homemade Bread, Cake and Pastry.

We have an abundance of wheat in the country right now. The big problem is where to store it. Secretary of Agriculture Wickard said recently:

"There's one way in which the women of the family might help the wheat storage situation. Do more home baking or use more baker's products. You homemakers can use all the flour you want because we have plenty of it. Try some of the new enriched flours or some of the whole wheat flours. They are health-giving and nourishing and things made with them taste good, too."

It's a long time since some of us have baked bread at home. Remember how good it was? And how the aroma of bread in the oven penetrated the house? Of course the Secretary suggests buying baker's bread, if that's the most convenient way to provide the "staff of life". But if you're one of those who have stopped making bread at home because you thought it "didn't pay", now's your time to indulge the family and make it pay wartime dividends in enjoyment. You'll be helping to use up some of that surplus wheat. Incidentally, if you are accustomed to bread made of "enriched" flour, buy that kind of flour to make your homemade bread.

Ingredients for ordinary bread are flour, liquid, salt, yeast, a little sugar and a little fat. Use your own preferred recipe, or try this one, from the Bureau of Home Economics:

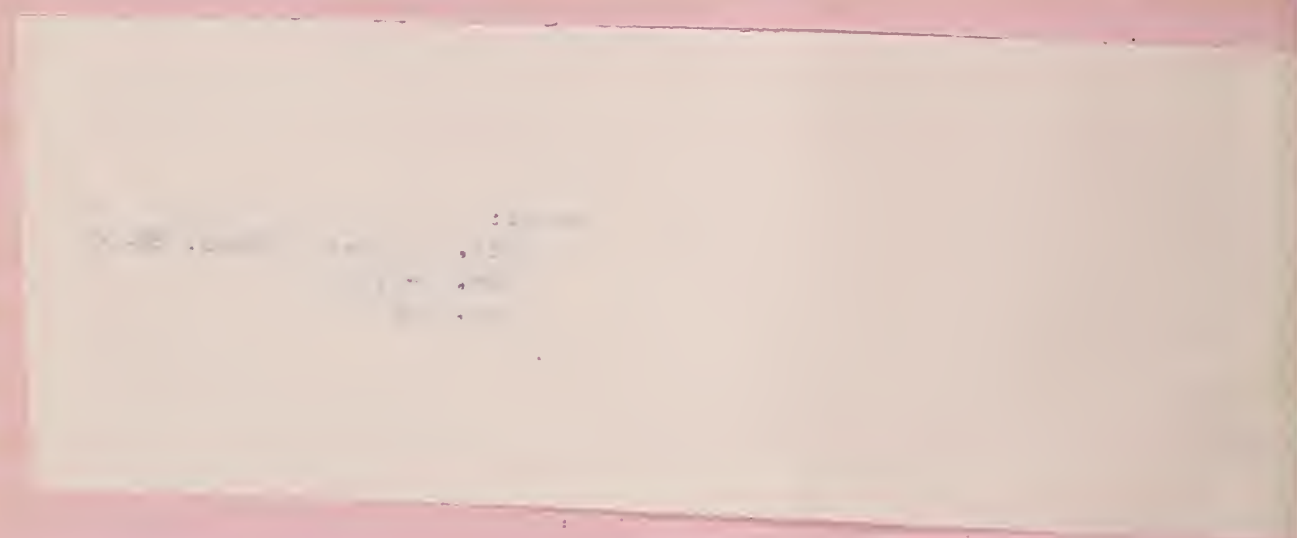
For 3-1/2 pounds of bread—a common amount for one baking—or about 4 loaves weighing nearly a pound each,— you will need 2-3/4 cups of liquid, 1 to 2 cakes of yeast, 3 tablespoons of sugar, 4 teaspoons of salt, 2 tablespoons of fat, and about

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2-1/4 pounds or quarts of sifted hard-wheat flour. The liquid may be water or milk, fresh, evaporated or dried - or potato water.

There are two common ways of making bread-- the straight-dough and the sponge methods. Straight-dough bread is made with compressed yeast. It takes about 4 hours from the time you mix the dough until it goes into the oven. Dried yeast takes a little longer to act than compressed yeast, so it is generally more satisfactory to use it to make a sponge early in the morning or the night before the bread is to be baked. Then you go ahead in the same way as with the shorter method.

Now about mixing the dough by the first or straight-dough method. First--and this is very important,-- keep the temperature of the room and the bread mixture between 80 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the bread-making. If you use milk, scald it first. Pour a little of the hot milk over the sugar, salt, and fat, and cool the rest. Set aside a small part-- about half a cup-- for softening the yeast, then add the yeast to the rest of the liquid, while the temperature is lukewarm. Add the dissolved sugar, fat and salt.

Next add all the flour except about 1 cupful to the liquid and mix thoroughly, either with your hands, a spoon, or a bread mixer. You can't tell exactly how much flour to add until you have made bread several times with the same kind of flour. And you'll need a little of the flour to dust the bread board for kneading. When you have had enough experience with the "feel" of the dough, you know when you have added enough flour.

When the dough no longer sticks to the sides of the mixing bowl, it is ready to knead. Kneading develops the gluten. If you are kneading it by hand, turn the dough out on a clean board and work it with the palms of the hands until it is soft, smooth and elastic. Use only a thin film of flour on the board. The stickiness will disappear as you knead.

Form the dough into a ball and put it into a greased bowl to rise. Turn once or twice so the whole surface is lightly greased to keep the surface from drying and cracking. Put a clean cloth over the bowl and a plate or other tight cover to help control the temperature, keep out dust and prevent drying.

When you use hard-wheat flour, the bread has a better texture and grain if it rises a second time. Test the dough with the finger-tip when it is about double in bulk. If it is light enough, punch it down, pull the sides over and press them into the center, then turn the ball of dough smooth side up. This is preferable to taking the dough out on the board, and you can do it in less than a minute. You don't need a second rising if you're using soft-wheat flour.

After the second rising, when the dough has the same volume as before, punch it down again and divide it into as many balls as you have bread pans. Let the balls wait a few minutes, then mold the loaves and set them to rise in the greased pans. Grease the top surface of each loaf lightly to keep it elastic and prevent its drying out.

Regulate the temperature of the last rising just as carefully as before--between 80 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit is right. When the loaves have doubled in bulk, bake in a moderately hot oven (385 degrees Fahrenheit for pound loaves). Turn the loaves around every 15 minutes, and lower the temperature to 350 degrees after the first quarter hour. Bake from 45 minutes to 1 hour. When the loaves shrink from the sides of the pan and give a hollow sound the bread is done. Place on a rack to cool. Never cover bread while it is warm.

You make refrigerator rolls by the same general method as bread, but they contain a little more sugar and fat and sometimes you add an egg. You'll find a recipe in a free government bulletin on homemade bread--No. 1775,-- as well as directions for making breads with different flours, and recipes for hot breads like biscuits, popovers, muffins, waffles and griddle cakes. Just write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture for a copy.

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